

VZCZCXRO9456
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSQ #0296/01 1081600
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 181600Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY SKOPJE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5964
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CDR TF FALCON
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RUESEN/SKOPJE BETA
RUEHSQ/USDAO SKOPJE MK
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SKOPJE 000296

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/18/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MK](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: GLASS HALF FULL -- FORGING AHEAD ON
POLITICAL DIALOGUE

REF: SKOPJE 283 AND PREVIOIUS

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D).

SUMMARY.

¶1. (C) Following high-level leadership discussions April 13 and 16, PM Gruevski and eAlbanian opposition DUI leader Ahmeti reached a compromise on a key DUI demand to reconstitute the Parliamentary Inter-ethnic Relations Committee. They did not reach agreement on a list of laws that would require Badinter (double majority) voting, but agreed to continue discussions on that issue at the leadership level the week of April 23. Both sides agreed to form separate Working Groups, one on a law on use of languages, and one to resolve the issue of social and financial support for eAlbanian victims of the 2001 conflict.

With the government having demonstrated a willingness to compromise on key issues so far, the burden now lies with Ahmeti and his DUI colleagues to match that flexibility if they wish to enjoy continued US and EUSR support for the political dialogue process. End summary.

DESPITE INITIAL IMPASSE.....

¶2. (U) With both government and opposition eAlbanian DUI negotiating teams having reached agreement on 39 of 127 Badinter (double majority) laws proposed by DUI (reftel), PM Gruevski and his VMRO-DPMNE team met with DUI President Ali Ahmeti and his team April 13 to try to conclude discussions on the list and to move forward on discussions of the reconstitution of the parliamentary Inter-ethnic Relations Committee (IEC). US Embassy and EUSR representatives observed the negotiations.

¶3. (SBU) Ahmeti agreed at the outset that there had been progress on the list of Badinter laws. He cautioned, however, that he would not agree to close either that issue or the IEC matter until he obtained agreement on the way forward on draft laws on the use of language law, and on NLA (National Liberation Army -- guerrilla insurgents in the 2001 conflict) veterans benefits. PM Gruevski said the government was willing to present some options for reconstituting the IEC, and would be willing to review a draft language law once DUI presented one. He ruled out a law on NLA veterans, but suggested a compromise package of benefits for those eAlbanian veterans and their families. Ahmeti was insistent on achieving agreement on all four issues before he would agree to close out any single one of them.

¶4. (C) Ahmeti also pressed Gruevski for an update on progress in the investigation into the shooting death of a close DUI associate, Isa Lika, in 2006, which DUI leaders suspect was a politically motivated murder. Minister of Interior Jankuloska told Ahmeti that she had assigned the MOI's best criminal investigator to the case, and that the original team looking into the matter had been replaced with a mixed eMacedonian-eAlbanian team that was reviewing the initial investigation and trying to uncover new evidence. The Prime Minister offered to let DUI assign its own criminal investigator to join the MOI team to monitor the case. Ahmeti did not respond to the offer.

¶5. (C) Gruevski made a plea for DUI's return to the Parliament, where he said the government and opposition needed to work together to continue legislative reforms necessary for NATO and EU membership. He pledged to continue implementation of the Framework Agreement and to push ahead on passing the Law on the Public Prosecutor, a NATO-related priority law. Ahmeti said DUI would not return to Parliament absent agreement on the four issues he had outlined. With the meeting at an impasse after nearly three hours of discussion, the government and DUI leaders agreed to reconvene on April 16.

....LEADERSHIP MEETINGS PRODUCE SIGNIFICANT COMPROMISE ON KEY AGENDA ITEM

¶6. (C) The Ambassador called Ahmeti the morning of April 16 to press him for greater willingness to compromise on the Badinter list and IEC issue, and to urge him to then return to Parliament to continue work on the language law and NLA

SKOPJE 00000296 002 OF 003

matter. She said the time was ripe to seize the results already achieved and to prepare to discuss outstanding issues in Parliament. She also advised Ahmeti not to press for an NLA law, which was politically untenable for the government, but to consider a compromise approach that would provide the victims of the 2001 conflict with compensatory benefits. Ahmeti said he thought PM Gruevski would demonstrate goodwill at the meeting scheduled for later the same day, but insisted he could not return to Parliament without a solution on all four issues.

¶7. (C) Both PM Gruevski and Ahmeti and their teams reconvened later that day for a five-hour meeting in which they continued discussion on the Badinter laws but did not reach compromise on a final list. Gruevski offered a compromise package of an additional seven Badinter laws, which DUI rejected as inadequate. Instead, Ahmeti asked for Badinter voting for an additional three laws (police law, law on regional economic development, and a law on referendums) which the government had rejected earlier. Gruevski said he would not reopen discussion on those three laws, and the groups adjourned for consultations.

¶8. (C) Returning to the negotiating table, Gruevski proposed reconstituting the IEC (a key DUI demand) by having the government cede one of its seats on the committee to give the opposition a 10-9 majority. That majority would, theoretically, allow the opposition to decide in favor of or against Badinter voting on future draft laws and amendments. Thanking the government for demonstrating goodwill on the issue, Ahmeti accepted the offer but insisted that it be codified in a legislative amendment. Gruevski agreed. He said the government could amend the Electoral Code to require MPs to declare their ethnicity before they were elected to serve on the IEC, a proposal DUI accepted.

WORKING GROUPS FOR LANGUAGE LAW AND VICTIMS OF CONFLICT

¶9. (C) DUI VP Musa Xhaferi returned to discussion of a law on NLA veterans that would provide them with benefits equal to those received by eMacedonian troops and police who had been

involved in the 2001 inter-ethnic conflict. Gruevski responded that an NLA law was politically impossible for him to accept, given the fierce reaction that would provoke in the eMacedonian public. Instead, he offered a package to resolve the problem of the war invalids. He proposed employing, in the state administration, 2001 conflict invalids from a list that DUI would provide. Those who could not work, but who qualified for benefits, would receive financial assistance. In exchange, Gruevski asked for DUI to pledge that it would not engage in triumphalism or public comment on the agreement.

¶10. (SBU) Concluding the meeting, the two sides agreed to continue discussions on the Badinter laws list at the leadership level. They agreed on the recomposition of the IEC, and on amending the Electoral Code to ensure MPs were properly selected for the Committee in the future, a key DUI demand. They also agreed to establish a Working Group on the language law issue (to begin work on April 19) and a separate Working Group on the victims of conflict compensation matter.

COMMENT: A GLASS HALF FULL

¶11. (C) Despite the lack of significant progress on the Badinter list, the government's compromise proposal on the IEC, and DUI's acceptance of that proposal, mark a significant step forward in the political dialogue process. The agreement on the Working Groups for the language and NLA issues also is a positive development, although we expect discussions in both groups will be extended and contentious. The main obstacle to further progress that could lead DUI to return to Parliament appears to be, at this juncture, Ahmeti's insistence on considering his opening positions on the issues under discussion as DUI's compromise positions. While the government has shown some flexibility, albeit under strong US-EU pressure, DUI has failed to budge despite similarly intense, coordinated pressure. We will tell Ahmeti in the days to come that he must demonstrate much greater willingness to compromise if he expects continued USG and EU support in this process.

SKOPJE 00000296 003 OF 003

MILOVANOVIC